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ABSTRACT

A course in the production of plays for and with children for presentation at elementary schools is outlined. This course involves choosing the play and mounting the production. The performance objectives indicate the student will: develop the necessary stage disciplines to perform as a member of a production unit; reacquaint himself with a child's world through examining nursery rhymes and children's stories; free his body and imagination through interpreting nursery rhymes and children's stories in mime form; contrast character stereotypes that are present in many children's stories; choose a play for production purposes; and organize the production elements of a children's play. The course outline consists of: I. Performance Objectives; II. Course Content; III. Teaching Strategies; IV. Learning Activities; V. Student Resources; and, VI. Teacher Resources. (LS)

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AUTHORIZED COURSE OF INSTRUCTION FOR THE QUINMESTER PROGRAM

CHILDREN'S THEATRE

5113.58
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5115.108
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5185.28

Drama, English

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COURSE TITLE: CHILDREN'S THEATRE

COURSE DESCRIPTION: The production of plays for and with children for presentation at elementary schools. This course involves choosing the play and mounting the production.

I. PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

A. The student will develop the necessary stage disciplines to perform as a member of a production unit.

B. The student will reacquaint himself with a child's world through examining nursery rhymes and children's stories.

C. The student will free his body and his imagination through interpreting nursery rhymes and children's stories in mime form.

D. The student will contrast character stereotypes that are present in many children's stories.

E. The student will choose a children's play for production purposes.

F. The student will organize the production elements of a children's play.

II. COURSE CONTENT

A. Rationale

Children's theatre is healthy for the performer and the audience. The actor learns freedom of expression, rids himself of inhibition, and responds to honest audience reaction. The audience, many of whom are unaware that live theatre exists, becomes attuned to stage magic. There is a give and take in children's theatre that is unique.

Two forms of children's theatre exist. In one the performer works for the children. In the other, children, themselves, become involved in the performance. An ideal in high school children's theatre would be to permit the more mature students to work with elementary age students on specific roles and/or in creative dramatics.

If such a learning experience could be arranged, mutual enjoyment and elucidation should result. This course, however, focuses on the production of plays for children rather than with children.

Not all students should be expected to perform all of the learning activities included. In a production class, however, many alternate paths lead to the final goal. The set construction crew for a production should not have acting roles in the same play. The costume designer will have to do research through reading books, visiting art museums, and working out color schemes. He might have to make patterns from scratch, and search through myriad bins of scrap material to stay within a reasonable budget.

B. Course outline

1. The actor's approach

   a. Essential stage disciplines
      (1) Stage concentration
      (2) Stage balance

   b. Presentational acting style
      (1) Audience centered approach
      (2) Emphasis of essential traits

   c. Voice and movement

   d. Imaginative approach towards stylized characters

2. Literary forms

   a. Nursery rhymes

   b. Children's stories

   c. Children's plays

3. Production elements

   a. Choosing the play

   b. Casting the play

   c. Scheduling rehearsals

   d. Designing the sets

e. Constructing the sets

f. Designing the costumes

g. Executing the costumes

h. Designing the make-up plot

i. Managing the play
   (1) Contacting the elementary schools
      (a) Initial contact letters
      (b) Contracting for specific dates
   (2) Budgeting for sets and costumes
   (3) Learning copyright laws and securing releases
   (4) Working publicity

III. TEACHING STRATEGIES

A. The teacher might provide writing assignments as an alternative objective for those students who might not wish to participate in the production itself.

1. The student might write an original children's story that could be dramatized.

2. The student might compare and contrast the stereotypes that are present in children's literature.

3. The student might adapt a children's story into play form for eventual production. The student must be made aware that the plot must have sufficient action, must present conflicts between characters and/or ideas, and that the dialogue must fit the character's style..

4. The student might investigate the similarities and differences in ethnic children's stories.

B. The teacher should set up discussion groups. Some topics that should be included are:

1. What are the values of children's stories and children's theatre? The focus of children's theatre should lie in the entertainment values inherent within the plays.

   a. Does a play have valid character development?

   b. What type of audience can the play reach?

   c. Does the play provide audience growth potential?

d. Are the characters and the situations overly hackneyed?

e. Is the language suitable to its potential audience?

f. Will the play hold the audience's interest?

2. Ideally, the choice of the play to be produced should result from sufficient reading, criticism, and discussion.

3. An essential discussion lies in the field of costume design. The psychology of color must be understood for children's theatre, and color coordination for showing character relationships and their development should be thoroughly researched and discussed.

C. The teacher might provide resource personnel. The following organizations have been concerned with children's theatre:

1. The drama department of the University of Miami, Coral Gables. This is an excellent source for technical assistance.

2. The Players' Theatre, which is located in the Museum of Science.

3. The Merry-Go-Round Playhouse in Coral Gables has been active in children's theatre for many years.

4. The North Miami Playhouse produces children's plays.

5. The Ft. Lauderdale Children's Theatre has been active for a number of years.

6. The art department of the school should be able to provide help.

7. The home economics department of the school can be a valuable resource.

D. The teacher might arrange field trips to children's theatre productions in Dade County. Nearly all local theatres provide student rates for interested groups, and the teacher might be able to arrange discussions with the director and the cast following the performance.

IV. LEARNING ACTIVITIES

A. The student will develop the necessary stage disciplines to perform as a member of a production unit.

1. The teacher should provide some basic concentration exercises.

a. The student will concentrate through performing mirror exercises. Two students face each other. One performs a simple action, and the other mirrors the action. (Viola Spolin, Improvisations for the Theatre, pp. 60-61, p. 66).

b. The student will concentrate through playing simple games like tug-of-war or jumping rope with imaginary objects. This helps the student to work with others and express the necessary physical tensions.

c. The student will concentrate by playing ball with others. Once the imaginary ball is in motion, the teacher will call out varying weights and sizes of balls to which the student must accommodate himself.

d. The student will concentrate through manipulating invisible objects and passing them on to other students.

The possibilities for concentration exercises are endless, and every drama director has favorite ones that work for him. For outstanding source material see Improvisation for the Theatre, by Viola Spolin, pp. 54-87, and Dade County's quinmester, "Basic Acting."

2. The student will improvise situations based on the characters of children's stories. Example: Cinderella meets Little Red Riding Hood as a storm begins to threaten.

3. Small groups of students will adapt a children's story into a readers' theatre presentation. (See Dade County's Quinmester, "Readers' Theatre") Since the characters of children's stories tend to be exaggerated, it is excellent vocal training for the interpreter to depend upon his voice to endow the material with life. He is forced into vocal vitality and variety if he wishes to be successful.

4. The student will prepare various pieces of stage business to suit the stereotypes. What are normal actions for characters as diverse as Sneezy, the dwarf, Hansel, Goldilocks, the wicked stepmother, Prince Charming, etc.?

5. The student will choose a type: hero, ingenue, villain, braggart, miser, etc., and improvise actions that the character might perform in relation to objects and/or other characters.

6. The student will develop style awareness in dealing with the definite types that inhabit children's stories. The hero's walk and stance must be different from the villain's. (For an excellent discussion on acting for children's theatre see Jed H. Davis, "Producing Theatre for Children's Audiences", in Geraldine E. Siks and Hazel B. Dunnington, eds., Children's Theatre and Creative Dramatics, pp. 93-95).

7. The students who do not perform in a production will act as critics to the performers. They will check for credibility and entertainment values of performers.

B. The student will reacquaint himself with a child's world through examining nursery rhymes and children's stories.

1. The student will report on a number of children's stories.

2. The student will tell a children's story to the class, which will pretend to be children.

3. The student will recite a nursery rhyme under varying circumstances. Ex. Student recites "Mary had a little lamb. . ." while she has to blow her nose, or survives a severe case of hiccups, or wonders whether her slip is showing.

4. The student will compile a bibliography of children's stories and/or nursery rhymes.

5. The student will write an original children's story.

6. The student will compare major characters in well-known children's stories.

C. The student will free his body and his imagination through interpreting nursery rhymes and children's stories in pantomime.

1. The student will choose a favorite piece of music and interpret his physical reactions so that they become clear to his audience. This helps free the performer from the world as he literally views it and permits him to express figurative values.

2. The student will pantomime a nursery rhyme. This exercise permits the performer to start examining the characters of children's theatre from an acting standpoint. As he interprets

> Jack be nimble
> Jack be quick
> Jack jump over the candlestick,

he must determine if Jack is a pyromaniac, if he is training for the Olympic Games, if he is undergoing tortures, if he is a tester for a candlestick manufacturer, if he is sluggish because of low blood pressure, or any other motivation that the student might develop. As the student broadens the concept, he also broadens his imagination and his character perception.

3. The students, in groups of two to four, will pantomime a children's story. Action is the soul of acting, and very few elementary students, as audience, would be capable of following Chekovian inner action. The children's show performer must rely on his freedom of bodily action and reaction and must learn to play off and to his fellow actors. As he works a pantomime with fellow students, he gains knowledge of sharing the stage picture.

D. The student will contrast character stereotypes that are present in many children's stories.

1. The student will analyze the stereotypes that are present in children's stories.

2. The student will examine the national and ethnic characteristics that appear in children's literature.

3. The student will compare the characteristics of Commedia Dell' Arte characters to the moral characteristics of children's story characters.

E. The student will choose a children's play for production purposes.

1. The students will read children's plays in order to become acquainted with the material.

2. The students will examine plays for suitability for the designated audience.

3. The student will examine plays for production feasibility. Questions that must be asked are:

a. Can the play be cast from the class?

b. Is the cast too large or too small?

c. Does the set require too much naturalistic detail for the play to be effective?

d. Does the play have merit for the audience and the actor?

e. Does the play condense into a fifty minute production?

f. Is there too much violence inherent in the play?

g. Are certain technical aspects essential to the play that make trouping the show impossible?

4. The students will choose a specific play for production purposes.

F. The student will organize the production elements of a children's show.

1. The students will audition for parts in the play, be cast, and maintain the designated rehearsal schedule. (Please note! Every director has his own technique for the above; however, a word of warning: do not neglect understudies for children's shows. The more performances that are given of a specific show over an extended period of time, the more understudies are employed. Students become ill. Students might not be able to get signed out of a regularly scheduled class. Students move out of the school district.)

2. A student will perform as assistant director to work with individual students on performance problems and to oversee the technical progress.

3. The student will design sets for the production. He has to keep in mind that the show will travel and that the sets must be collapsible and sturdy enough to take the wear and the tear.

4. The student will construct and paint the sets. Bright colors are essential for children's shows. Realism is seldom demanded by the play itself or by the young audience.

5. The student will design costumes for the show. Color and color coordination are of more importance than realistic details.

6. The student will build the costumes for the show. It is to be hoped that help from the Home Economics department will be available.

7. The student will design the make-up for the show. Since many children's plays call for animal characters, witches, dolls, etc., this is a demanding and important function to the total production.

8. The student will learn to apply the make-up of the various characters. This is a valuable lesson, and enough time should be devoted to it. (See Dade County quin, "Faces for the Actor.")

9. The student will devise the sound and music for the production. Every children's show calls for transition music, and it would be marvelous to have a musically talented youngster who could write original music for the production.

10. The student will organize the business management of the production. This involves:

    a. Contacting the elementary schools

    b. Working out business arrangements with the elementary schools

        (1) P.T.A. funding
        (2) General fund from the school
        (3) Advertising in elementary school
        (4) Specific dates, places, and times

c. Budgeting sets, props, and costumes for the play

d. Providing transportation for students and sets to the elementary schools.

11. The student will devise a publicity campaign for the production.

a. Local newspapers have to be contacted.

b. Pictures should be taken of the production.

c. Posters have to be made available for the elementary schools.

12. The student will draw posters for the publicity campaign.

V. STUDENT RESOURCES

A. State-adopted textbooks

Albright, Hardie. Acting: The Creative Process. Belmont, California, Dickenson Publishing Co., Inc., 1969.

Beck, et.al. Play Production in the High School. Skokie, Illinois, National Textbook Co., 1968.

B. Supplementary material

Children's stories:

Artists and Writers Guild, Inc. The Tall Book of Nursery Tales. New York, Harper and Brothers, 1943.

Carpenter, Frances, ed. Tales of a Chinese Grandmother. Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1937.

Child Study Association of America. The Children's Bookshelf. New York, Bantam Books, 1965.

Holiday Storybook. Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1952.

Hamer, Stuart O., et.al. Exploring Our Country. Follett Publishing Co., 1953.

Tolstoy, Alexei. Russian Tales for Children. New York, E. P. Lutton Co., 1947.

Uchida, Yochiko. The Dancing Kettle and Other Japanese Folk Tales. New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949.

Ward, Winifred. Stories to Dramatize. Anchorage, Kentucky, The Children's Theatre Press, 1952.

Children's theatre:

Davis, Jed., et. al. Children's Theatre. New York, Harper and Row Publishing Co., Inc., 1960.

Howard, Vernon, ed. The Complete Book of Children's Theatre. New York, Doubleday, 1969.

Birner, William, ed. Twenty Plays for Young People. Anchorage, Kentucky, Anchorage Press, 1967.

Siks, Geraldine B. and Dunnington, Hazel B., eds. Children's Theatre and Creative Dramatics. Seattle, Wash., University of Washington Press, 1961.

VI. TEACHER RESOURCES

In addition to the books listed under student resources, the teacher should become acquainted with some of the following:

Acting:

Cholerton, J. World of Mime. New Rochelle, N. Y., Soccer Association.

Coger, Leslie P. and White, M. R. Readers Theatre Handbook. Glenview, Ill., Scott, Foresman and Co., 1967.

Cole, Toby. Acting: A Handbook of the Stanislavsky Method. New York, Crown Publishing Co., Inc.

Moore, Sonia. Stanislavski System. New York, Pocket Books, Inc.

Siks, Geraldine B. Creative Dramatics: An Art For Children. New York, Harper and Brothers, 1958.

Spolin, Viola. Improvisation for the Theatre. Chicago, Ill., Coach House Press, Inc., 1963.

Make-up:

Corey, Irene. Mask of Reality: An Approach to Design for the Theatre. Anchorage, Kentucky, Anchorage Press, 1968.

Corson, Richard. Stage Make-Up. 4th ed. New York, Appleton Century, Meredith Press, 1967.

Costumes:

Barton, Lucy. Appreciating Costumes. Boston, Mass. Walter H. Baker Co., 1969.

Barton, Lucy. Historic Costumes for the Stage. Boston, Mass., Baker's Plays, 1961.

Barton, Lucy and Edson, Doris. Period Patterns. Boston, Mass., Baker's Plays, 1942.

Stage design:

Cheney, Sheldon. Stage Decoration. Bronx, N.Y., Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1967.

Joseph, Stephen. New Theatre Forms. New York, Theatre Arts, 1968.

Scene Painting and Design. New York, Pitman Publishing Corp., 1964.